

Greetings;

I want to keep all of you informed of developments as we go through the legislative session and I have several new items to brief you on. First, I sent you an email with information about the House's version of the budget. Now I can report that the Senate has also filed their appropriations bill. Funding provided for TJJD in both versions is very close to what we've asked for in our base budget. However, rather than specify how the money would be spent, it provides a total amount and leaves it to the Legislature to examine the current challenges we face as an agency and to set a vision that addresses those challenges. It also identifies specific policy questions that should be considered. I take it as a positive sign that, although the uses of funding are not specified, the total amount of funding is very close to our base request. Neither bill eliminates TJJD, or requires us to close facilities, or specify anything about how much funding will be used in what areas. What it does is accelerate an on-going conversation about how to give youth in the juvenile justice system the greatest chance of success.

Another important event was the release of the Council of State Government Justice Center's report titled "Closer to Home: An Analysis of the State and Local Impact of the Texas Juvenile Justice Reforms." This is the most in-depth analysis of juvenile justice data in Texas and one of the most, if not THE most, in-depth analysis nationally. It was widely reported in local, state and national media. The study was commissioned by Texas state leaders interested in understanding the impact of the state's reforms of its juvenile justice system. It compares the impact on youth under community supervision versus incarceration in state correctional facilities.

The primary takeaways from the study are that the reforms in Texas over the past eight years have been largely successful, both in reducing the number of youth in state facilities and keeping them closer to home for rehabilitation and treatment. However, recidivism rates for both the state and counties remain high. Sixty-four percent of youth under juvenile probation supervision in 2010 were rearrested within three years, while 77 percent of youth released from a state juvenile correctional facility in 2010 were rearrested during the same period. The 3-year reincarceration rate for these youth was 14 percent for juveniles beginning probation supervision and 44 percent for juveniles released from a state-run juvenile correctional facility. The data used for the study was accumulated between 2007 and 2012. I encourage everyone to take a look at this important work when you have time. It can be found at <http://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/texas-JJ-reform-closer-to-home.pdf>. You can view the Executive Summary at <http://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/exec-summary-closer-to-home.pdf>.

The "Closer To Home" report demands that we take a fresh look at juvenile justice in Texas and how we can improve the system at all levels. On the county side, in addition to supporting further commitment reduction efforts, we are seeking to continue to expand promising prevention efforts, those aimed at preventing kids from ever entering the system, and moving toward creating a tighter connection between our funding support to local probation departments for programs/services consistent with

the Core Principles For Reducing Recidivism. We will also focus on providing enhanced guidance and increased training and technical support for our county partners.

On the state facilities side, you're going to be hearing discussions on how to transform TJJD into a more efficient and cost-effective agency that improves youth outcomes. For many years, it has been widely acknowledged that we can achieve better outcomes if we can keep youth:

- closer to home,
- in smaller facilities,
- in locations where services are readily available,
- where family and parental participation in programs and interventions can be maximized, and
- where transitioning them back home can be more effectively accomplished.

Our agency has been in a transition now for several years and the transition will continue. The focus of the transition is directed toward our primary mission and that is to improve outcomes for the kids who are in our care and for whom we have a responsibility. Transitions involve change and managing that change in a productive manner will be the hallmark of our efforts and will be reflected in the recommendations we will offer the legislature.

The vision we have articulated to move toward smaller, state-operated, regionally based facilities for the reasons stated above is not a new concept. It has been discussed for a number of years at many levels in Texas. The only thing that has changed is that the research is now overwhelming supporting and reinforcing that direction and we believe it is the next natural step in the reform movement. We are a very large and diverse state which adds to the challenges before us but we must remain focused on our mission.

We are only in the beginning stages of discussing this regional concept and the extent to which it will be acceptable and ultimately adopted is unknown and so there will be uncertainty for us while the legislative process evolves during the coming months. There may be other models that will emerge and be considered as well. Hopefully, through this process, the best plan for Texas will emerge and we will turn the page to a better system that enhances our capacity to improve outcomes.

I recognize that uncertainty is a difficult circumstance to deal with. My only expectation is that each of us focus on what we can control – our own individual job responsibilities – and carry out those responsibilities professionally and with a sense of common purpose.

And also let me take this opportunity to express special condolences to our staff at Evins who are getting the job done in spite of their grief over the passing of Donald Brooks, Superintendent at Evins who will be sorely missed by all.

I will do my best to keep you informed of further developments as we proceed through the legislative session. Thank you to each of you for continuing to do the often difficult tasks associated with improving the lives of the youth in our care.

David